Saviour of Gandhiji

BATAQ MIYA ANSARI

Syed Naseer Ahamed

English Translation :

BVK Purnanandam

SAVIOUR OF GANDHIJI
BATAQ MIYA ANSARI

Syed Naseer Ahamed

Translation :

B.V.K. Purnanandam

AZAD HOUSE OF PUBLICATIONS
UNDAVALLI - 522501

SAVIOUR OF GANDHIJI : BATAQ MIYA ANSARI

AHP Series No. : 16

Written in Telugu by : **Syed Naseer Ahamed**

Translated into English by : **BVK Purnanandam**

All Rights Reserved with author.

Year of Publication : 2019

Published by : **Azad House of Publications**

Flat : C-2, Sree Rams Arcade,
Amaravathi Road
UNDAVALLI - 522501
Tadepally Mandalam,
Guntur Dist, Andhrapradesh.
Mobile : 9440241727

: naseerahamedsyed@gmail.com
naseerwriter2017@gmail.com

Typeset and Printed at : Jaya Deepthi Graphics, Vinukonda

Price : Rs. 25-00

It was in 1917...

Mahatma Gandhi travelled by train from Muzafarpur and at about 3 O' clock in the evening, on 15th April, he reached the railway station in Motihar which was the district head quarters of Champaran in Bihar state. Indigo farmers from several villages accorded a grand welcome to him. Champaran was famous for its Indigo plantations and Indigo factories for a century. English people were the owners of the majority of Indigo plantations and factories. Indian farmers in Champaran were small and marginal. Most of the Indian farmers in Champaran were tenant farmers. The British Government was favouarable to the English owners.As the land and Indigo factories were under their ownership, the English owners started acting against the interests of the farmers to reap profits from Indigo crop and production of Indigo dye.They imposed TIN KATHIA agreement on them and started collecting forcibly various taxes such as TAVAN, JIRATH and ABWAB. They exploited the labour of the farmers as per the feudal method of BEGAR and subjected them to bonded labour.

The farmers who opposed or resented the cruel methods of English owners had to face dire consequences. The farmers were helpless as the English owners' word prevailed over the Government and bureaucracy. When their evil deeds became unbearable, the revolts, organized by farmers, sometimes were oppressed with an iron hand and the farmers were subjected to untold hardships with the support of the English officers.

Mahatma Gandhi came to Motihar on the requests made by Rajkumar Shukla (1875-1929), Pir Muhammad Ansari Munis (1882-1949) of Champaran, to rescue the suffering farmers of Champaran region from the miserable situation. As Mahatma Gandhi got into action on the very next day of reaching Motihar, the farmers of Champaran region started

meeting him in large numbers and started recounting the evil deeds of the owners of Indigo plantations and Indigo factories.

In a way not expected by the English owners, the suffering farmers started revealing the cruel deeds of their English owners without any fear or inhibition. On noticing the adverse situation, the English Indigo factories owners wanted to put an end to the activities of Mahatma Gandhi and deployed the British Government Officers and British courts for the purpose. Neither the police nor the courts could curb the peaceful and non violent agitation of Mahatma. The English Indigo planters became nervous as the farmers went on revealing the cruelty and exploitation of their owners with evidences undaunted by the dire consequences like severe punishments they would have to face from the British officers.

The English owners decided to remove Mahatma Gandhi from Champaran. The worst among them, Irwin, hatched out a plan to invite Mahatma Gandhi to his house for dinner and kill him by poisoning his food. He employed his cook Bataq Miya Ansari (1867-1957) for that purpose. He ordered Bataq Miya Ansari to give Gandhiji milk laced with poison. When Bataq Miya hesitates to obey the order, he promised him to give land, rich gifts and hike in his salary. He warned the poor man of dire consequences if he disobeyed the order. Bataq Miya Ansari, who knew well how cruel his master was, kept silent without giving any response.

As per his plan Indigo planter Irwin invited Mahatma and his followers to his house for dinner. Mahatma, who did not doubt the invitation of the Englishman, attended the dinner along with his colleague and lawyer Babu Rajendra Prasad. During dinner, Bataq Miya Ansari went straight to Gandhiji and revealed that the milk served to them was laced with poison. The bold act of Bataq Miya Ansari saved Gandhiji's life from the conspiracy hatched out by Irwin.

Irwin went into rage as his plan to end Mahatma Gandhi's life had failed that too because of his cook who disobeyed his orders.Irwin's rage led to horrible consequences. Bataq Miya Ansari lost his job, his properties were confiscated and his house was auctioned. The British police arrested him and subjected him to horrible physical torture.Irwin had Ansari's family driven out of his native village Siswa Ajgari.But, Ansari bore all the hardships happily for having been able to prevent Mahatma Gandhi from

being a victim to the murderous conspiracy of Englishmen and left his native village along with his family to an unknown place.

Thus, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who played a key role in putting an end to the British rule in India, survived the attempt on his life made by the Englishmen in 1917 because of the bold act of Bataq Miya Ansari. But, Bataq Miya Ansari, the bold man who saved the great leader's life, faded into oblivion. .

◆ ◆ ◆

After the Plessey War in 1757, the Englishmen continued their exploitation at will. They intensified the production and export of Indigo Dye, which was very useful in the textile dyeing industry of those days. The production and export of Indigo dye which they started initially in Bengal region was gradually extended to Bihar. The Englishmen who intensified Indigo crop and Indigo dye production in the Champaran region of Bihar gained ownership of the lands with the support of British Government and its officers with the aim of maximizing profits. The Englishmen forced the farmers to grow Indigo crop in as much area as they wanted and sell the crop to them at the price they decided. They imposed TIN KATHIA agreement on the farmers according to which the farmers had to grow indigo crop in 3 of 20 parts in the lands. In the process of enforcing the agreement they started collecting 40 types of Taxes and penalties for violating the agreement.

They started levying various types of taxes and fines on farmers to compensate any losses they suffered due to changes that took place in the international market and metrological and geographical conditions. Though there was wide spread resentment against the economic and psychological expatiation, the farmers could not do anything about it as the English owners enjoyed the support of British government officials and British police officers. Taking advantage of the helplessness of farmers, the English Indigo factories owners and their staff fleeced the farmers at will and weakened them economically. In the absence of a person or a system that can question the evil deeds of the English owners, the farmers of Champaran were forced to be submissive to the English Indigo Planters.

With the advent of freedom movement on the Indian soil that emboldened people to question the hegemony of the British on their

motherland, the farmers of Champran who had hitherto been victims of exploitation, started revolting gradually against the English Indigo planters. Notwithstanding the cruel repressive measures taken by the English factory owners to curb the rebellion, there arose leadership among farmers that drew its spirit from the freedom struggle and kept the flame of rebellion burning among the farmers.

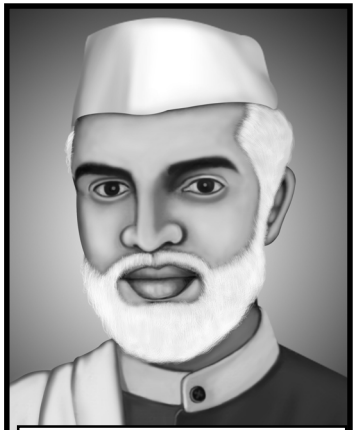
SHEIK GULAB

Sheik Gulab was one of the leaders who emerged from among the farmers of Champaran region. He was a resident of a village named CHAND BARWAH which was in the jurisdiction of Sathi or Sati police station in Bihar. His father Sheik Raktun, was a rich landlord. Though Sheik Gulab did not have much formal education, he was intelligent and courageous and never tolerated injustice. Having hailed from a family that opposed the hegemony and evil deeds of the foreign rulers and their henchmen, it was but natural that Sheik Gulab sounded the bugle of revolt against the British rule.

Sheik Gulab could not bear to see the farmers of Champaran being exploited by the English owners of the Indigo plantations and Indigo dye factories and he came on the arena of confrontation in 1905 to fight for justice to the farmers. Initially he worked with Sheik Munvar of his native village to mobilize the farmers against the English owners. In the beginning leaders from the nighbouring villages such as Jagan Lal, Hafizuddin Mohammed Ansari (1831-1961) Babu Seethal Ray, Harbans Sahay, Hafiz Mohammed Saani (1888-1951) joined them. Later Pir Muhammad Munis Ansari (1882-1949), a writer with revolutionary ideas joined hands with them. With the intellectual cooperation from Pir Munis the revolt led by the farmer leaders gained new vigour. In those days houses of Sheik Gulab, Babu Seetal Ray, Hafiz Deen Mohammad, Radhemal and Pir Muha-mmad Munis became secret places for discussions on agitation of farmers and for planning strategies.

Sheik Gulab raised his voice of dissent against the cruel deeds of the English owners. He met farmers directly and asked them to defy TIN KATHIA and not to pay unjust taxes and penalties and organized them to do so. At that time inspired farmers belonging to various villages, Babulal

Misra, Ganapathi Ray, Kenhar Ray and others stood firmly in support of Sheik Gulab. The farmers who had swallowed the cruel deeds of the English owners silently all those years saw the honesty and fearlessness of Sheik Gulab and followed him. The farmers of Champaran united above caste and religions and considered the word of Sheik Gulab as inviolable.


SHEIK GULAB

For the first time in 1907, the farmers of Sathi defied TIN KATHIA and boycotted cultivation of Indigo crop. They challenged, in an organized manner, the clerks and goons of English owners who forced them to pay penalties for their defiance. The English owners could not tolerate the defiance of the farmers who had been submissive to them for decades. They got the water supply to their farms stopped. Angered at the unfair act, the farmers expressed their resentment by organizing a demonstration under the leadership of Sheik Gulab.

The English owners decided not to spare Sheik Gulab any longer as he was organizing farmers against them. They schemed to subdue Sheik Gulab and his followers by luring them with financial benefits and jobs. They got the orders issued appointing Sheik Gulab and his followers as special constables in Police Department. Shaik Gulab and his followers did not give in to the lures and refused to honour the orders. They were detained, several criminal charges were framed, cases were foisted and sentences were imposed on them. But all the sentences were quashed by a Higher Court in 1908.

In that process Sheik Gulab approached the magistrate of Motihar along with a large number of farmers for the first time and submitted a memorandum to him narrating the problems of farmers and cruel deeds of English owners. Angered at this, the English owners intensified their acts of vengeance against the farmers with the support of British officers. In that situation Sheik Gulab visited Champaran Collector and submitted a memorandum to him to do justice to the farmers. The Collector responded immediately and ordered an enquiry. As the enquiry officer did not do his

job fairly, Sheik Gulab lodged a complaint against the unfair enquiry to higher officials. Unable to stomach the audacity of Sheik Gulab's acts, the English officers decided to suppress the farmers agitation.Consequently F C Coffin, an English owner in Sathi area got false cases foisted on Sheik Gulab and his followers. As a result, Sheikv Gulab and his followers were arrested on 12 September, 1907.Sentences were imposed on Sheik Gulab and 162 farmers and they were sent to jails. Later on the sentences were quashed by a Higher Court.

Inspired by the undaunted way in which Sheik Gulab was going ahead and noticing the sacrifices he was making, the farmers of neighbouring areas also united in large numbers under his leadership and started defying the power of the British and their orders. As Sheik Gulab could not be subdued by lures, F C Coffin, an English owner plotted several conspiracies to weaken Sheik Gulab financially. As a result Sheik Gulab's family not only suffered financial losses but also faced physical attacks and lost land and other properties.

Taking into account all these developments Sheik Gulab and his co-activists met in the house of Radhemal belonging to Betiah and decided to intensify the agitation further. Addressing a meeting attended by a large number of farmers on the occasion of Dusserah festival in 1908, Sheik Gulab, Seethal Ray and Raj Kumar Shukla gave a call to the farmers to stop cultivating Indigo crop. Pursuant to the call, the farmers stopped cultivating Indigo crop. As a reaction to this, the English manager of Parasu Indigo factory and his servant resorted to violence on farmers and the farmers retaliated and attacked the manager and his servant. Emboldened by this attack, formers of other areas also started retaliating, when the English men resorted to violence on them.

Shocked by these developments, the English owners of Indigo factories started taking vindictive actions on the farmer. With the connivance of British officers they resorted to unlawful detentions of farmer's leaders and other activists. Claiming that there was law and order problem because of the farmers' agitation, the British officers put up police outpost in the villages and started collecting forcibly the expenditure incurred from the farmers of the respective villages. Even then, the farmers agitation continued unabated. The police and military forces, dispatched to villages started resorting to violence and looted the farmers.

None of the English owner's vindictive actions could deter the revolutionary activities of Sheik Gulab. When a warrant was issued for his arrest, Gulab continued his activities clandestinely without being noticed by the British Police and its spies. The farmers of the villages protected their dearest leader by maintaining silence about his whereabouts. Having failed to arrest Gulab, the British Government announced a reward of five hundred rupees, confiscated land and the job of Police Constable to those who catch him alive and hand over to the police. The British police and military forces brought pressure on the people for the whereabouts of Gulab and resorted to violence on the farmers and people. Under these adverse circumstances Gulab travelled clandestinely in bullock cart to Bettiah Court and surrendered himself to the officer present there.

Sheik Gulab and his co-activists were arrested on charges of criminal activities. A large number of farmers were arrested. The British Government had to make special arrangements as the number of arrests was large. At least about two hundred farmers and their leaders were imprisoned. Two years jail term and a penalty of a thousand rupees were imposed on Sheik Gulab.

In the back drop of these developments, the British government appointed W R Gourlay committee to inquire about the problems of farmers in Bettiah and Sathi areas in Champaran region. Gourlay committee submitted its report to the Government on 7 April, 1909. Pursuant to the recommendations of the committee, the farmers undergoing jail term were released on certain conditions. But, Sheik Gulab was released only after he served full term in Jail. Sheik Gulab fell ill as a result of the cruel treatment meted out to him by the police. His eye sight became dim.

After his release from jail, Sheik Gulab started working for the farmers as far as his health permitted. In that process, Gulab, Rajkumar Shukla, Pir Muhammad Munis and others discussed the idea of bringing Mahatma Gandhi to Champaran. Accordingly Sheik Gulab played a key role in bringing Mahatma to Champaran in 1917. When Gandhi agreed to come to Champaran and revealed his travel details, Sheik Gulab and his co-activists campaigned extensively about the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi to Champaran. As a result of their campaign a large number of farmers turned up at Mothihar Railway Station on 15 April, 1917 when Mahatma Gandhi arrived there and accorded him a grand welcome.

Farmers in large numbers participated in the enquiry conducted by Mahatma Gandhi as a result of the awareness and fearlessness created among farmers by the agitation organized by Sheik Gulab and his comrades and submitted representations to him, revealing the evil deeds of the English owners of Indigo plantations and Indigo dye factories. Sheik Gulab was with Gandhiji as long as he stayed in Champaran actively participating not only in activities related to farmers problems, but also in social activities aimed at Hindu – Muslim unity. After the Champaran Sathyagraha led by Mahatma Gandhi put an end lawfully to the cruel deeds of the English owners of Indigo plantation and Indigo factories, the farmers' leader Sheik Gulab passed away in 1920.

PIR MUHAMMAD ANSARI MUNIS

Pir Muhammad Ansari Munis (1882-1949), the journalist, whose association added a new vigour to the Champaran farmers agitation started by Sheik Gulab in 1905, was born in 1882 in Bettaih village. His father was Fathingan Miyan. Right from the beginning, Pir Muhammad was opposed to the exploitation done by English owners of Indigo Plantations and Indigo dye factories. He chose his pen as a weapon to express his ideas. Working as a teacher in Guru Training School, he started writing letters and articles for Hindi news papers adding the pen name MUNIS (which means Comrade) to his name. Gradually Pir Muhammad Ansari came to be known as Pir Muhammad Munis.

Pir Muhammad Munis worked as a reporter of Champaran area to a Kanpur based weekly news paper PRATAP started by the noted revolutionary and journalist, Ganesh Sankar Vidyardhi (1890-1931) in 1913. The news paper subsequently became a daily. Pir Munis used to contribute articles and news on the problems of people in general and farmers in particular exposing the exploitation and cruel deeds committed by the British officers and owners of Indigo plantations and Indigo dye factories. Besides PRATAP, he used to write for other Hindi papers on the issues of people and farmers of Champaran area.

The writings of Pir Munis provoked anger among British officers and English owners of Indigo plantations and Indigo dye factories. The records of British Government used words such as BADMASH PATHRAKAAR, DANGEROUS, NO- TRIOUS, HOODLUM

JOURNALIST, and BITTER MAN to express their hatred against him. They declared his writings as DOUBTFUL LITERATURE. Unmindful of what the British records called him; he went ahead under the guidance of the revolutionary Ganesh Sankar Vidyardhi and stood fearlessly in support of Champaran farmers. He worked relentlesly to take the issues of Champaran farmers from local level to national level.

PIR MUHAMMAD MUNIS

Pir Munis not only extended his support to the farmers agitation led by Sheik Gulab but also provided guidance to the agitational programmes. His house became the secret centre to the agitation. His article in HINDI KESARI describing the agitation of Champaran farmers under the title NEEL VIBHRAT ANDOLAN (Indigo Resistance Movement) unsettled British officers. His articles and news items on the Champaran farmer's agitation attracted the attention of not only the leaders of Indian National Congress but also British Government. Though the vigour of the agitation subsided after the crackdown of the British Government on Sheik Gulab and his co-activists, Munis continued to write on the problems of Champaran.His articles in PRATAP:PRARDHANA (06-09-1915), CHAMPARAN MEIN ATHYA-CHAAR (17-02-1916), CHAMPARAN MEIN ANDHERA (13-03-1916), BIHAR SARKAR KA EK ANUCHIT KARYA (03-04-1916) brought the hardships of the farmers to public notice.

At last Pir Munis and Raj Kumar Shukla, on the suggestion of Sheik Gulab, thought of bringing the sorrowful plight of Champaran farmers to Mahatma Gandhi's notice. Pursuant to their decision to do so, Pir Munis wrote three letters to Gandhi between February to March 1917 discussing their hardships and saying 'the excesses on the Farmers of Champaran by the Britishers are no less than those on you and your fellow sathyagrahis in South Africa'. Raj Kumar Shukla and Pir Munis attended Indian National Congress conference in Lucknow in 1916 and met Gandhiji. The Representation drafted by Pir Munis was handed over to Mahatma by Raj

Kumar Shukla, as 'Raj Kumar Shukla was an illiterate farmer' (An Autobiography, MK Gandhi, Page 354). Gandhiji was so much impressed by the writings of Pir Munis that he visited the house of Pir Munis and enquired his mother about her well being on 23 April, 1917 at Bettiah.

As a result of these efforts Gandhiji agreed to come to Champaran. Munis gave wide publicity through his co-activists that Gandhiji was coming to Champaran. The news about Gandhji coming to Champaran was published in PRATAP under the column PRARDHANA. The British officers were unsettled when a monk was caught distributing the pamphlets published under this column. In the list of the people extending support to Gandhiji, prepared by the British officers, the name of Munis was among the foremost, as Munis was with Gandhiji right from his arrival at Champaran till his departure.

Undaunted by the threats he received from the Britishers, Munis fearlessly reported the events of Champaran Satyagraha farmers movement from the beginning till the end. He wrote several articles in PRATAP news paper during those days: CHAMPARAN KI DURDASHA (16-04-1917), CHAMPARAN ME KARMVEER GANDHIJI KA AAGAMAN (30-04-1917), CHAMPARAN MEIN MAHATMA GANDHI (7, 8, 28, May 1917), CHAMPARAN MEIN TIN KATHIYA PRATHA (21 May, 4, 11, 18 June 1917) Ect., He also got a book CHAMPARAN KA UDDAR published by PRATAP news paper. Consequently he had to taste the anger of Britishers. The English owners got him dismissed from his job. His properties were confiscated. A false criminal case was filed against him on several allegations and he was sentenced to a term of six months in jail. The sentence was reduced to three months on appeal. The miserable treatment he was meted out in the jail was described in an editorial in 30 September 1918 issue of PRATAP with the caption SANSANI PHAILANEWALE MUKADDAMA.

Champaran Sathyagraha Movement was a prelude to the Indian Freedom Struggle that took shape under the stewardship of Mahatma Gandhi. In the records of the British Police as to who was behind Gandhiji's coming to Champaran, it was written: 'Pir Muhammad is actually a dangerous and hoodlum journalist who, through his questionable literature, brought into light the sufferings of a backward place like champaran in Bihar and influenced Mr. Gandhi to visit Champaran'. Even after the

departure of Gandhiji from Champaran, he continued his fight on behalf of the victims. He published articles like CHAMPARAN MEIN PHIR ATYACHAR (30-08-1918), CHAMPARAN MEIN PHIR NADIRSHAHI (30-08-1920) and made English owners and British officers spend sleepless nights. He wrote articles for news papers like PRATAP, BALAK, and JANA SHAKTHI with titles such as DUKHI ATMA (Crying Soul), EK DUKHI ATHMA (A Crying Soul), and SANHUBHUTHI HRUDAY (Sympathetic Heart) and brought the plight of the farmers to the notice of leaders of Indian National Congress.

Pir Munis formed RYTHU SABHA (Farmers Conference) in 1918 to unite the suffering farmers. He fought under the banner of RYTHU SABHA for solving the problems of Sugar Cane farmers. Pir Munis did not tolerate the hegemony of the English owners on the farmers who started farming Sugar Cane instead of Indigo and guided the agitating Sugar Cane farmers. Pir Muhammad did not confine his fight for farmers alone. He worked for the protection of the rights of the people in general. He united Harijan sanitary workers and fought for their reasonable rights. As the founding member of 'Bihar Hindi Sahithya Sammelan' he put in a great deal of effort for the development and spread of HINDUSTHANI. As the intellectual who felt the need for unity of Hindus and Muslims for the emancipation of motherland, he did a lot in that direction. He exhorted that unity in diversity and diversity in unity should be the cardinal principles for the progress of India.

As a person with a strong aversion to the English, Pir Munis participated actively in the Freedom Struggle. He played a pivotal role in forming the Champaran District Chapter of Indian National Congress in 1921. He was elected to Champaran Zilla Paishad. In 1937 he resigned from the post of President of Bettiah Local Board in response to the call given by Gandhiji and participated in Individual Sathyagraha. He was imprisoned for three months in Patna camp prison for participating in Salt Sathyagraha. Pir Muhammad, who used his pen as a weapon to fight for the emancipation of mother land in general and for the well being of the people and farmers in particular, undaunted all the troubles created by the British Government and the English owners of Indigo plantations and Indigo dye Factories, passed away on 24 December 1949.

KARMAVEER IN CHAMPARAN

Mahatma Gandhi, Who was declared as KARMAVEER by the people of Champaran, first reached Patna. Raj Kumar Shukla took him to the house of Babu Rajendra Prasad who was an advocate in Patna. At that time Rajendra Prasad was not in Patna. His servants did not allow Gandhiji into the house because of his caste. He was kept waiting in verandh. He was not allowed to use the toilet. The servants even objected when Gandhiji was drawing water from the well in the yard. Gandhiji mentioned all these things in his autobiography and in a letter he wrote to Maganlal. He wrote, 'they considered us as beggars'. At that time he remembered that one of his friends in London, Moulana Mazaharul Haq (1866-1930) was a resident of Patna and sent a word to him describing the troubles they were facing. Moulana Haq rushed to the place immediately and made necessary arrangements to take them to Muzafarpur.

Mahatma along with Raj Kumar Shukla went to Muzafarpur from Patna and from there reached Champaran. In his autobiography Gandhiji narrated the events of Champaran Sathyagraha Movement under the heading THE STAIN OF INDIGO and various other headings.Gandhi was welcomed by a large number of farmers in Motihar Railway Station.Soon after reaching Motihar, Gandhiji started his enquiry. As the ground was well prepared before Gandhji's arrival by Sheik Gulab under whose leadership the farmers were united and by Journalists like Pir Muhammad Munis who gave a lot of publicity about Gandhiji's arrival, farmers started coming to Gandhiji in large numbers and narrated their problems and cruelty of English owners without any fear or hesitation.

Describing this situation in his autobiography Gandjhiji wrote, 'our work became heavy. Farmers started coming in groups after groups getting their statements recorded. Crowds at the volunteers recording the statements of farmers went on swelling. The house was full of people'. The presence of reputed lawyers such as Babu Rajendra Prasad, Moulana Mazruhal Haq, Braj Kishore Prasad along with Gandhiji enthused the farmers. Ignoring their English owners, farmers went on narrating the cruel deeds of the Englishmen. Noticing the adverse situation the English owners tried to restrain Gandhiji legally but in vain. It was decided that Moulana Mazharul Haq and Rajendra Prasad should take the

responsibilities of Gandhiji in case he was arrested. The British Government had to keep watching helplessly as people and lawyers in large numbers walked along Gandhiji .

This caused anger to English owners. Mentioning this in his autobiography, Gandhiji wrote 'I know that the English owners in Champaran are angry. I know that the officers also are not happy with this. They cannot do any harm to me but I know that they will torture the poor farmers and that will hamper the inquiry I wanted to do. Then the English owners started disinformation campaign. They started publishing false statements against me and followers' (Autobiography (Telugu), MK Gandhi, Page 362). A manager of Indigo Dye Factory named Bettiah Raj said, 'May be Gandhiji is honest, but he is over estimating himself after his successes in South Africa. It is easy to turn him into a martyr but it is impossible to suppress him' This gives us an idea how angry the English were with Gandhiji. Prompted by this an English owner called Irwin entered the field. He made an attempt on Gandhiji's life in 1917. We find bitter criticisms, allegations and counter allegations in the correspondence Gandhiji had with Irwin. Gandhiji started a school for the development of education among the boys and girls of Champaran. The school which was made of bamboo and hay was set on fire. As a part of these vindictive actions, Irwin hatched a conspiracy to end Gandhiji's life by poisoning his food but the father of the nation survived the conspiracy and achieved success in Champaran only because of Bataq Miya Ansari who aborted Irwin's plot.

At last Champaran Sathyagraha Movement under the stewardship of Gandhiji achieved success. An enquiry committee under the chairmanship of Sir Frank Sly was constituted by the British Government in pursuance of the discussions between Gandhiji and Sir Edward Gait, Bihar-Orissa Governor in Ranchi on 5 June 1917. Gandhiji was one of the committee members. He submitted to the committee all the eight thousand and odd complaints along with evidence he received from the framers of Champaran. The committee submitted its report to the Government on 29 November 2017 declaring that all the accusations made by farmers were true. The committee recommended that Tin Kathia agreement be abolished and that a part of the money collected by the English owners should be paid back to the farmers. (Autobiography (Telugu), M K Gandhi, Page

369). Gandhiji bade good bye to his co activists in Champaran only after the recommendations of the committee were made public by the Government.

All the attempts made by English owners and officers to nullify the recommendations of the Committee failed. At last Champaran Agrarian Act of 1918 was enacted. With the advent of the act, 'the Tin Kathia Agreement which had been in force for a hundred years stood abolished. The hegemony of English owners on the farmers of Champaran came to a close'(Autobiography (Telugu), MK Gandhi, and Page 369). It was only because of the daring step that Bataq Miaya Ansari had taken that Gandhiji survived the conspiracy hatched by English owners and led the freedom struggle from the forefront.

◆ ◆ ◆

It was in 1950…

Motihar Railway Station in the west Champaran of Bihar, Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad, the first president of India, was speaking in a meeting conducted on the occasion of the son of the soil visiting the region. Suddenly there was a disturbance from a quarter of the audience: An old man who wanted to meet Dr. Rajendra Prasad was being obstructed by the police. The president of India looked in that direction. Surprisingly he recognized the old man as Bataq Miya Ansari who saved Gandhiji's life by alerting him that the food he was about to consume was laced with poison. Dr. Rajendra Prasad himself invited Bataq Miya Ansari to come on to the dais. When he came on to the dais, Rajendra Prasad hugged him affectionately and made him sit beside him honourably. The audience were surprised at this unexpected development. The question as to who he was made several rounds in the minds of the audience.

The first president of India Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad recalled the events of 1917. He remembered the courage displayed by Bataq Miya Ansari in saving the life of Gandhiji from the conspiracy hatched by English owners to end his life. Questioning the audience if they were surprised about who the old man was, he recounted the episode in detail. He declared that Ansari saved the life of Gandhiji from the conspiracy hatched by an English owner namely Irwin to end his life. It was only then that the facts

about the attempt on Gandhiji's life and about Bataq Miya Ansari who aborted the conspiracy came to be known to the world.

Bataq Miya Ansari told the president Babu Rajendra Prasad in detail the consequences he had faced for violating the order of his master, Irwin, on that day. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was shocked to know that Bataq Miya Ansari's family was driven out of his village by the cruel English men. He immediately ordered the District Collector to allot 36 Bhigas of agricultural land to the family of Bataq Miya Ansari and his three sons Shair Muhammad Ansari, Muhammad Rashid Ansari and Muhammad Jamal Ansari for their livelihood (It is variously mentioned in historical records as 50/25/24 Acres / Bhigas).

There are different stories on the unexpected meeting of Dr Babu Rajendra Prasad and Bataq Miya Ansari. One of them was by Prof Girish Mishra, lecturer in Economics Kirorimal College Delhi. Girish Mishra was a ten years old boy in 1950 and he was among the audience in that meeting, when the unexpected meeting of Bataq Miya Ansari and Babu Rajendra Prasad took place. He narrated the event in detail in an article he wrote for Main Stream weekly in 2010. He wrote that the President of India had revealed the episode of the attempt on Gandhiji's life and how Bataq Miya Ansari aborted the conspiracy and saved Gandhiji's life. Prof Girish Mishra clearly mentioned that president Rajendra Prasad on noticing the miserable plight of Bataq Miya Ansari, had ordered the District collector to allot 50 acres of land to Bataq Miya Ansari's family.

The following research scholars like Dr Mohammad Sajjad, (Professor, Alighar Muslim University, Alighar), Ajaz Ashraf, (Journalist & Writer Delhi), Afroz Alam Shahil, (Writer & Editor: twocircle.net, Okhla, New Delhi), Sandeep Bhaskar, (Journalist), Sanchari Pal (Journalist), Aravind Das, (Journalist, Media Vigil), who did extensive research on the Farmers Movement in Champaran confirmed with necessary evidence that President Dr Babu Rajendra Prasad had revealed the courageous act of Bataq Miya Ansari in the meeting. Though their narrations differ in respect of the questions such as: 'why did the president visit Motihar? At which railway station did he address the people? Did the President see Bataq Miaya Ansari first? Did Bataq Miya Ansari rush forward to see the president? Did the president order for the allotment of 24/25/50 acres or 36 Bhigas of land to Bataq Miya?', all these narrations express in one voice that

Bataq Miya Ansari saved Gandhiji's life by aborting Irwin's conspiracy of poisoning Gandhiji's food.

With the President of India himself issuing orders to the District officers for allotment of agricultural land to his family, Bataq Miya Ansari felt happy that good days were ahead for his family which had gone through extreme misery. But that happiness did not last long. His countless visits to government offices for seven long years seeking the implementation of the presidential order were of no avail. At last Bataq Miya Ansari passed away on 4 December 1957.

Bataq Miya Ansari's family received a letter on December 3 of 1957 from the President's additional private secretary Vidyanath Varma confirming the Presidential orders. Later his family members were invited to Delhi on 3rd December 1958. In memory of the sacrifices made by Bataq Miya Ansari, the president Rajendra Prasad had posed for photographs with his family members (Hindusthani Muslamano ka Jange-e-azadi mein Hissa, Syed Ibrahim Fikri, New Delhi 1999, Page.23). Ansari's sons kept on showing those photographs to people and government officials for a long time.

After numerous visits to government offices seeking the implementation of the Presidential order, it was at last in 1958 that six acres of land was allotted to the family not in their native village Siswa Ajgari but in a village about a hundred miles away from it, Ekwaparsavni. Not having any other means of livelihood, Bataq Miya's family migrated to Ekwaparsavni village in 1960 to cultivate the little land allotted to them. Even that land was handed over to them only after six years because it took so much time to clear the objections raised by forest department. Even then the land was found to be not suitable for cultivation as it was in the flood plain of a river. Since then Ansari's heirs have been requesting the executive heads of the state government to implement the presidential order in toto and in its true spirit, but no one has bothered to care them.

The land allotment to Bataq Miya Ansari by Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad was notified in Gazette dated 27-01-1962. A Copy of the notification is safely with Ansari's sons (Hindusthani Muslamano ka Jange-e-azadi mein Hissa, Syed Ibrahim Fikri, New Delhi 1999, Page.23). Ansari's family is in possession of the copies of orders issued by the president himself to the

District Collector and all the orders issued subsequently by other higher officers, but the land entitled to Ansari's family has not come to their possession till now. In that way four decades of time silently melted away.

In 1990, the State Minorities Commission of Bihar brought to the notice of the State government the injustice meted out to Ansari's family citing the presedential order. At that time there was a discussion in the State Legislative Assembly to do justice to Bataq Miya Ansari's family by implementiting the presidential order. The issue drew the attention of media too. On account of these things Bataq Miaya Ansari's sacrifice and courage came to be known to people. Consequently a grave was built for him in his native village. A museum was built in his name in the district office.

After that Ashraf Khadri (1990) and Syed Ibrahim Fikri (1999) revealed to the world through their books the courageous story of Bataq Miya Ansari and the injustice done to his family. Syed Ibrahim Fikri's book 'Hindusthani Muslamano ka Jange-e-azadi mein Hissa' was published with the financial assistance of the education department of Human Resources Development Ministry of the Government of India. In this book the details of the Presidential Order and other notifications are mentioned. But none of the appeals made by people, prominent persons and writers could wake the government from its slumber. Justice was not done to Bataq Miya Ansari's family. This had been a topic for discussion for some time but with the passage of time it sank into the sea of oblivion.

After a decade or so Hindustan Times published a news item on 22 January 2010 with the title FAMILY OF MAHATMA'S SAVIOUR IN DIRE STRAITS describing the pitiable condition of Bataq Miya Ansari's family. The then President of India Smt. Prathibha Patil's office responded to the news item. Archana Datta, Officer on Special Duty of Presedent's office wrote letters to the District collector of East Champaran and West Champatan districts instructing them to implement the presidential order with immediate effect.

Though the District collectors acknowledged receipt of the letters, and the Chief Minisster Nitish Kumar declared that the presidential order would be implemented soon, nothing was done in the matter. Bataq Miya's third generation heirs are still meeting government officers and people's representatives showing them the order and notifications of the

government, but there is no progress in the issue.Yet heirs of Ansari are living with the hope that justice will be done to them on one day or the other.

◆ ◆ ◆

We are clueless to the question why the event of Bataq Miya Ansari's saving the life of Gandhiji, who played a pivotal role in Indian Freedom Struggle and was called THE FATHER OF THE NATION, was not properly recorded in the pages of history. Mahatma Gandhi promptly mentions all the events in his life and all the people he met in his life in his books, articles and periodicals. We are equally clueless why Gandhiji who responded to even smaller things in his life, did not mention in his writings the name of Bataq Miya Ansari who aborted the conspiracy of the English Indigo planters, saved his life and faced dire consequences for doing so. Surprisingly Gandhiji mentioned none of the leaders of Champaran farmers such as Sheik Gulab, Pir Muhammad Munis, Harbans Sahay and Sheetal Ray in his writings.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who returned to his mother land from South Africa in 1915, wrote AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY or THE STORY OF MY EXPEIMENTS WITH TRUTH in 1925. He gave an account of all the events in South Africa and those that happened in India in his Auto biography which was published in two parts: the first in 1924 and the second in 1929. The book was translated into several languages.

In this book Gandhiji recorded his experiences in Champaran under several headings such as THE STAIN OF INDIGO, THE GENTLE BIHARI, FACE TO FACE WITH AHIMSA, CASE WITHDRAWN, METHOD OF WORK, COMPANIONS, PENETRATING THE VILLAGES, WHEN A GOVERNOR IS GOOD, IN TOUCH WITH LABOUR. Surprisingly in none of these was there a mention of the names of the leaders of Champaran farmers except that of Raj Kumar Shukla.

Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad too wrote profusely on the history of Champaran and Champaran Sathyagraha, but nowhere did he mention the name of Bataq Miya Ansari. Dr Rajan Babu was the direct witness to the event when Bataq Miya Ansari aborted the attempt on the life of Mahatma Gandhi. It was only because of that reason that the President revealed the event of historical importance in the public meeting in 1950.

Dr Prasad, displayed a great deal of concern for the well being of Ansari's family but it is difficult to understand why he did not mention the sacrifice and courage of Bataq Miya Ansari.

Though Pir Muhammad Munis took part actively in the Champaran Movement and communicated all the details to the public through PRATAP and other news papers, nowhere did he mention Bataq Miya Ansari's episode. Mahatma spent about 6/9 months in Champaran Sathyagraha Movement and Pir Munis reported all the events during that time to PRATAP and other news papers.

Why Pir Muhammad Munis did not write about the conspiracy to murder Gandhiji by poisoning his food and about Bataq Miya Ansari who aborted the conspiracy and faced dire consequences for doing so is an answerless question. Noted historian KK Datta Collected some papers, letters and the script of a book titled HISTORY OF CHAMPARAN written by Pir Munis from the house of Munis. He wanted to publish the papers and letters as WRITINGS OF MUNIS. He also wanted to publish the book HISTORY OF CHAMPARAN. But all the papers, letters and the book were lost in the earthquake of 1934. Hence it is not known whether Munis wrote about Bataq Miya Ansari's episode or not. Munis reported to PRATAP news paper not only the main events of Champaran Sathyagraha, but also each and every minor detail of that movement. But why he ignored the news item of paramount importance about the horrible conspiracy to murder Gandhjiji and about the man who saved Gandhiji's life by revealing the conspiracy to him is inscrutable.

However, it is a historical tragedy that Bataq Miya Ansari did not get proper place in the history of Indian Freedom struggle in spite of his displaying exemplary courage in saving the life of no less a person than the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who built a special chapter for himself in the history of Indian Freedom Struggle. It is even more tragic that the orders of the first president of India Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad, who was the direct witness to the event and revealed the sacrifices and courage of Ansari, to allot a certain area of agricultural land to salvage his family from penury has been gathering dust among the files of a democratic government for seven decades. ◆

REFERENCE

BOOKS :

01. Hindustani Musalmano ka Jang-e-Azadi Mein Hissa (Hindi), Syed Ibrahim Fikri, New Delhi, 1999.
02. Muslim Freedom fighters (English), Syed Ubaidur Rahaman, New Delhi, 2017.
03. The Immortals (Album in English and Telugu), Syed Naseer Ahamed, Azad House of Publicatons, Undavalli, Andhrapradesh, 2014.
04. Chirasmaraneeyulu (Telugu), Syed Naseer Ahamed, Azad House of Publicatons, Vinukonda, Andhrapradesh, 2008.
05. Shek Gulab (Hindi), Afroz Alam Shahil, New Delhi, 2017.
06. Dalith Freedom Fighters, (English), Mohan Dass Namisharay, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2010
07. Mazharul Haque (English), Dr Aeyamuddin Ahmad and Dr Jata Sankar Jha, Publication Division, Govt of India, 1976.
08. The Muslim Elite (English), Ali Ashraf, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 1982.
09. Muslims and Freedom Movement In India (English), Kamta Chaubey, Ghugh Publications, Allahabad, 1990.
10. Peer Muhammad Moonis Kalam Sathyagrahi (Hindi), Sreekanth, Prabhat Prakashan, New Delhi, 2017.
11. Sathyasodhana leka Athma Katha (Telugu), Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Telugu Tranlation by Vemuri Radhakrishnamurthy, Navajeval Publishing House, Ahamadabad, 1993.
12. Remembering Muslim Makers of Modern Bihar, Compiled & Edited by Dr. Mohammad Sajjad, Brown Book Publications, New Delhi, 2019.
13. An Autobiography, or The Story of My experiments with trugh, MK Gandhi, Navajeval Publishing House, Ahamadabad, 2004.

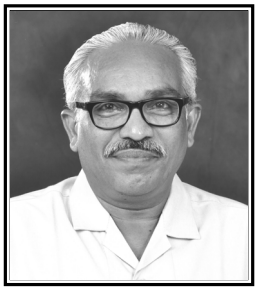
ARTICLES :

01. Batakh Mian vs Nathuram Godse : How has India forgotten about the man who refused to poison Gandhi? - Ajaz Ashraf
02. On the 100th anniversary of the Champaran Satyagraha, the family of the man who saved Gandhi says the country has forgotten him.- S. Anoop.
03. Family of Mahatma's saviour in dire straits.-BV Murty, Hindustan Times
04. Batak Mian – forgotten patriot who saved Mahatma's life in 1917, Manzar Bilal, Two Circles.net., January 30, 2010.
05 The Forgotten Cook Who Paid Heavily For Refusing To Poison Mahatma Gandhim, Sanchari Pal January 30, 2018.
06. Unrewarded saviour and unsung hero, Sandeep Bhaskar, Deccan Herald, Oct 03 2009.
07. Pir Mohammad Munis: An organic intellectual activist of the Champaran Satyagraha, Mohammad Sajjad, Aligarh Muslim University, May 1, 2013.
08. Here's The Story Of Pir Muhammad Munis, A Hindi Journalist And Unsung Hero Of Champaran Satyagraha, Afroz Alam Sahil, Journalist, Delhi.
09. Champaran : Jis Admine Gandhi ki jan Bachaye, desh aur system use bhoolgaya (Hindi), Chandana Srivastav.
10. Mahathma Gandhi ki jaan Bachane vaale Bataq Miya Ansari (Hindi),Jabir Hussain, Patna,Bihar.
11. Champaran Sathyagraha : Retrieving Some Forgotten Heroes, Mohammad Sajjad and Afroz Alam Shahil, History and Sociology of South Asia 12 (1) 1-16, 2007, Jamia Millia Islamia, Sage Publications.

VIDEOS :

01. Batak Mian: Forgotten patriot who saved Bapu's life in 1917
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sj9Ajqk9Mp4
02. Mahatma Gandhi Ko Bachaane Waale Shakhm Ko Jaanatain Hain aap?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOCvxWNUqDI

About Author...



Mr. Syed Naseer Ahamed was born on 22 December, 1955 (As per official Records 01-08-1954) in a farmer's family in Purini, a village in Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh. His mother was Syed Beebijan and his father Syed Mera Mohiddin.Mr Naseer had his primary education in Purini and further education in different places like Kavali, Narasaraopet, Bhopal, Chitradurga and Guntur.

Mr. Naseer gave up government job to practice law. There upon working as a reporter for UDAYAM, a Telugu daily, he rose, in a span of ten years, to the level of News Coordinator in its Vijayawada edition. Later on he worked for a period of Six years as coordinator for Siti Cable Network Private Limited (Vijayawada), looking after its News and Legal matters. After that he joined in VAARATHA, a Telugu daily, as a News Bureau Incharge of its Guntur edition. He took voluntary retirement from the job in 2004 and dedicated himself completely to Travel-Research-Writing-Publication and Campaign activities.

Though he started writing since his school days his poems were first published in 1975 in Maro Prapancham, a hand written monthly. Later several of his short stories, cartoons were published in 1976 in several Telugu monthly magazines such as Pragathi, Jayasree and Jyothi. Since then many of his poems, songs, short stories and hundreds of political, social, literary, historical essays, reviews and cartoons have been published. He worked with his friend VSR Avadhani in running a hand written monthly magazine MARO PRAPANCHAM and BHERI. He extended his service as honorary and associate editor to various periodicals published by several social organisations. He edited and published INDIA a monthly from 2006 to 2011.

He started writing books from 1998 on THE ROLE OF MUSLIMS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR THE FREEDOM OF INDIA in Telugu language and has 14 books to his credit. They are 1. Indian Freedom Movement: Muslims 2. Indian Freedom Movement: Muslim Women, 3. Indian Freedom Movement: Muslim People's Struggles, 4. Indian Freedom Movement: Andhra Pradesh Muslims, 5. Indian Freedom Struggle: Muslim Heroes, 6. Chirasmaraneeyulu (100 life sketches of Muslim Freedom Fighters in brief), 7. 1857: Muslims, 8. Mysore Tiger Teepu Sultan, 9. Shaheed-e-Azam Ashfhaqulla Khan, 10. Aksharasilpulu (Directory of 333 Muslim Writers and Poets who are Writing in Telugu). 11. Charithardhulu (Album of Muslim Heroes of Indian subcontinent who fought against British colonial rulers from 1757 to 1947), 12. Kuwait Kaburlu, 13. Bismil - Ashfaq and 14. Pandit Ramprasad Bismil – Ashfhaqhullah Khan. All his books have been reprinted several times.

Of these books SHAHEED-E-AZAM ASHFHAQHULLAH KHAN has been translated into Urdu. PANDIT RAMPRASAD BISMIL-ASHFHAQULLAH KHAN has been published in Telugu, English and Urdu languages and altogether 20,000 copies of the book have been distributed free of cost in more than 250 towns India

wide and in abroad. The album CHARITHARDHUYLU / THE IMMORTALS published in Telugu and English in 2014 and became popular nationally and internationally is going to be published in Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Gujarathi and Marati languages very shortly. This album comprises the portraits of 155 Muslim Freedom Fighters along with their brief sketches in English and Telugu. These portraits and related information have been published and are being serialized by several periodicals from various states of India besides the two Telugu states.

Mr Naseer Ahamed's lengthy essay in English INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE - ROLE OF MUSLIMS found a place in the collection of essays published by Alighar Muslim University. This essay found its place in the special souvenirs of several organisations and periodicals.

With the sole aim of spreading the information about Indian Muslim Freedom Fighters, to every nook and corner of not only India but also the world, he is organising EXHIBITIONS OF THE PORTRAITS OF MUSLIM FREEDOM FIGHTERS OF INDIA throughout India on invitation of different organizations and persons. With the cooperation of various organizations and friends NAME STICKERS and CALENDARS with the pictures and details of Indian Muslim Freedom Fighters are being printed in bulk and distributed among the students and public free of cost. BOOKLETS with the information of those freedom fighters who carved a niche for themselves in the freedom struggle have been printed in bulk and distributed throughout India as a gift to readers with the active support of the friends. Visiting card size SPECIAL CARDS, on which pictures of the selected freedom fighters with their brief information are being printed in bulk and distributed among the interested.

Mr. Naseer has been sending PDF files of his books free of cost since last 12 years to all those who request him for the pdf files of his books. So far he mailed PDF files more than 16,000 interested readers. He got two WEBSITES developed for down loading his works very easily by any one. Naseer has been, developing all the ways so that his books on the role of muslims in the struggle for the freedom of India, reach thousands of readers in India and abroad through his websites and BLOGS. Mr. Naseer has been striving hard for the past 21 years to popularise the sacrifices of courageous sons and daughters of India among people in general and youth and children in particular. Mr. Naseer Ahamed is the only person in India who is writing books and articles and propagating by different kinds of novel methods and exhibitions for the last 21 years on this exclusive subject i.e THE ROLE OF MUSLIMS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR THE FREEDOM OF INDIA.

Mr. Naseer is a multifaceted personality. He is an actor, painter, cartoonist, orator, journalist, lawyer and social activist. He has received 16 awards so far from regional and national organisations. He participated in hundreds of international, national and regional conferences, seminars and symposia on invitation. Writing with a zeal for democratization of knowledge, Mr. Syed Naseer Ahamed aims to contribute his mite as a writer in building a secular, socialist, democratic, egalitarian society.

- Azad House of Publications.